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The Biriyani Murder Case: DNA Profiling becomes voice of Mutilated Human Body

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Abstract

Identifying a victim becomes difficult when the body has been dismembered, decomposed or deliberately altered, since fingerprints, dental records and visual recognition are often unusable. We describe the forensic examination of suspected human remains recovered from a large biriyani vessel in the Guduvanchery case, Tamil Nadu, in August 2026. Dismembered remains of a woman had earlier been found in a suitcase aboard a train at Agra Cantonment, and additional remains were reportedly recovered from a rented house in Guduvanchery. The sealed vessel held solid particulate material and foul-smelling decomposed fluid. Its contents were documented systematically, and the alleged use of vinegar and the possible presence of animal-derived material were considered when planning sampling and analysis. Scalp tissue with attached hair and muscle tissue were identified. The scalp tissue was preserved and sent for DNA profiling, and the profile matched the victim's identified dismembered remains, confirming that the fragments belonged to one individual. This case shows that careful documentation, separate sampling, proper preservation and DNA analysis can establish identity when conventional methods fail. It also supports a multifactorial approach that combines circumstantial information, autopsy findings and laboratory investigation.

Keywords: DNA profiling, mutilated body, dismemberment, body encasement, personal identification, forensic pathology

Introduction

Identification is very important to be determined both in living and the dead person. Fixing up of the individuality of a person has got its own significance in civil cases like inheritance of property, passport, missing persons, disputed sex, marriage or in criminal caseslike identificationof an accused in criminaloffences of murder, dacoit, sexual offences etc.1 Identification of a living person is based entirely on known fingerprints, birthmarks or several personal impressions with regard to characteristic gestures, movements or shape and other features of the teeth, eyes and hair, or voice2 Traditional post mortem identification is based on fingerprint, dental or skeletal evidence. However, deaths as a result of fires, explosions, airplane crashes, and other traumatic events, as well as old remains are difficult to identify via traditional methods3.

When examining burned, mutilated, decomposed or skeletonized remains, identification by visual means, fingerprints or other identifying techniques is many times not possible.

In such cases following questions are asked by the investigating agencies, What is the sex of the human remains? 2) What is the age of remains? 3) What is the cause of death? 4) Possibility to establish specific identity of the individual. To answer this complete autopsy examination including a dental examination and DNA analysis should be done4.

Objectives ofAutopsy in Extremely Mutilated Bodies or Dismemberment or encasement bodies includes the following:

1. To establish whether the biological material is of human or animal origin.
2. To establish the general identity of the deceased, including age and sex.
3. To establish the specific identity of the deceased using scientific methods.
4. To determine the cause and manner of death, wherever possible.
5. To examine and document the nature and extent of mutilation.
6. To assist investigating team by providing relevant forensic evidence.
7. To collect and preserve evidence for further laboratory analysis.
8. To identify and correlate the recovered body fragments, wherever possible

Case History:

In August 2026, dismembered human remains were found in an unattended red trolley suitcase aboard the Tamil Nadu Express at Agra Cantonment railway station. The train had left Chennai Central for New Delhi. On 5 August 2026, railway authorities were alerted to a foul smell coming from an unattended suitcase in an unreserved compartment.5 Railway police who opened it reportedly found the headless, dismembered and decomposed remains of a woman.

The investigation was traced to Guduvanchery in the Chengalpattu region of Tamil Nadu after investigators studied CCTV footage from railway stations and other locations. Media reports stated that the footage showed a man and a woman carrying a red trolley suitcase into Chennai Central and leaving it on the train before departure. Using CCTV recordings, railway travel information and other technical evidence, investigators reportedly reconstructed their movements and followed their route back to Guduvanchery.



Police then searched a rented house on Mosque Street in Guduvanchery, where further human remains were reportedly recovered from a large cooking vessel (Figure 01). The woman was identified in police-related reporting as Hayathun Nisha, aged 38, a native of Odisha who lived in Guduvanchery and worked for a private firm. Amissing-person complaint had earlier been lodged when she could not be found. The second recovery led to further inquiry into the suspected homicide and into the relationship between the remains found at the two locations.

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Police later arrested Manik Uddin Laskar, aged 22, and his wife, Bhagabati Majhi, in Manipur in connection with the case. Media reports citing investigators suggested that the motive involved a deteriorating relationship and disputes over marriage. These are reported police allegations. They have not been established through judicial proceedings and should not be read as judicial findings.[5,6]





The vessel containing the suspected remains was brought by the investigating police to the crime scene for forensic examination. According to the reported confession, the accused had used vinegar in a large biryani vessel (Figure 02) in an attempt to dissolve the remains. The fragmented and decomposed state of the material, and its recovery from two separate locations, made it difficult to establish identity and to meet the other aims of a medicolegal examination. A systematic forensic examination was therefore needed to decide whether the fragments belonged to one individual.



Figure 01



Figure 02

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Forensic Examination: The exhibit was a cooking vessel of the type commonly used to prepare or store biriyani. Its lid was sealed with a dough-like substance identified as maida (refined wheat flour). The outer appearance of the vessel, lid and sealing material was documented before opening, and the integrity of the seal was assessed on receipt.

The vessel was opened under documented examination conditions. On gross examination, solid particulate material lay in the upper portion and foul-smelling, decomposed fluid in the lower portion. The contents were examined step by step and photographed before and during removal. The examination was difficult because the biological material was fragmented, mixed with other substances and recovered from a cooking vessel rather than from an intact body. The alleged use of vinegar and the possible presence of other cooking-related substances were considered relevant when assessing the condition of the material and planning further tests.

Insuchcircumstances, the possible presence of animalDNAmustbe keptinmind during sample selection, laboratory analysis and interpretation. If animal meat or other animal-derived material is mixed with human tissue, DNA extracted from the contents may contain genetic material from more than one species. How well each source is detected depends on its relative quantity and condition, the degree of decomposition, environmental and chemical exposure, and the analytical method used. Where vinegar or other cooking-related substances may have touched the samples, their effect on DNA recovery should be evaluated and not simply assumed.

To limit cross-contamination and make results easier to interpret, recognizable human tissue, suspected animal-derived material, solid particulate matter and decomposed fluid should be sampled separately wherever feasible. When the origin of a material is uncertain, separate extraction and species-specific molecular testing may be considered. Mitochondrial DNA analysis, validated species-specific polymerase chain reaction (PCR) assays or DNA barcoding can help identify animal species, depending on sample quality and laboratory capability. Appropriate controls and validated methods are essential, especially when mixed-species DNA is suspected.

The limits of such testing should be understood. Detecting animal DNA would show that animal-derived material was present in the tested sample. It would not by itself show that the material came from meat used in cooking, when it entered the vessel, or that it was deliberately mixed with human remains. Failing to detect animal DNA would not exclude animal-derived material either, particularly in highly degraded or chemically affected samples. In the present case, animal DNA analysis is described only as an additional investigative consideration, because no result of such testing is available.

Unlike a traditional autopsy on an intact body, these cases can be examined with the following checklists.

Description of the recovered material

1. Number and type of fragments or packages recovered.
2. Identifiable anatomical structures and tissues present.
3. Condition of the material, including decomposition or other alteration, foul-smelling fluid, discoloration or foreign substances; preservation of anatomical features and any visible injuries; photographic documentation with scale and labels.

Postmortem examination of the exhibit material

1. Type and extent of the examination performed, and the reasons for any limitations; anatomical structures available for examination.
2. Presence of cut surfaces, fractures, tears or irregular margins; differentiation of injuries from decomposition or handling artefacts, where possible.
3. Histopathological assessment of vital reactions, if feasible.
4. Whether the cause and manner of death could be established.
5. Limitations and inconclusive findings, as recorded by the examining doctor.

On careful examination of the vessel, scalp tissue with attached hair (Figures 03 and 04) and muscle tissue (Figure 05) were identified. The scalp tissue was collected, preserved and sent for DNA profiling. The DNA profile matched that of the victim's already identified dismembered remains, confirming that the

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scalp tissue belonged to the same individual. The fragmented and decomposed state of the material limited conventional examination. Careful documentation, correct preservation of samples and DNA analysis were what made identification possible in this case.

Figure 04 shows the hair sample being pulled out from that large vessel with suspectedremains. Figure05shows entangledhair mass withscalptissuesintact. Figure 05 shows cut piece of muscle tissues(arrow mark)

.



Figure 03



Figure 04

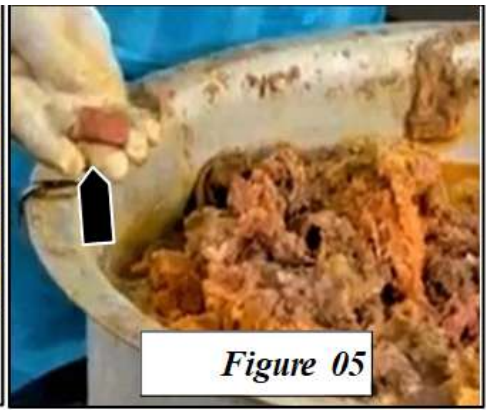


Figure 05

Checklist for identification and reconstruction

1. How was human origin established?
2. Was the minimum number of individuals assessed?
3. Could fragments be matched anatomically or reassembled?
4. Was biological profiling possible (sex, age, stature or ancestry, where scientifically appropriate)?
5. Were dental records, fingerprints, surgical implants or other identifiers available?
6. Was identity confirmed by DNA or another validated method?
7. Could the sequence or mechanism of dismemberment be inferred, and what evidence supports it?
8. Which conclusions remain speculative or cannot be established?

Discussion

Mutilation is an act or instance of destroying, removing or severely damaging a limb or other body part of a person. According to Dorland's Illustrated Medical Dictionary, mutilation is defined as “the act of depriving an individual of a limb, member or another important part of the body; or deprival of an organ; or severed disfigurement”.7 There are varying motives behind mutilations, primarily to discard the body and/or aggravate identification, whereas others are performed to humiliate the victim, to carry out sexual acts, or as an expression of strong aggression or mental illness.8,9,10 The act of mutilation may be unintentional, which may be caused by insects and animals11. In this case, the body was dismembered into multiple parts, followed by their alleged encasement in a large biryani vessel. Dismemberment can be divided into defensive and offensive types. Defensive dismemberment is characterized by a systematic approach, which serves the purpose of hiding the body. Offensive dismemberment, on the other hand, is often characterized by an indiscriminate approachandthe mutilationof the genitals.12,13 Apartfrom parameters of identity, the manner and method of dismemberment can play a crucial role. Encasement refers to enclosing or confining a body or its fragments within a container or other material.In crime scene investigationsof dismemberedbodies, there are technical modalities that can help specialists in the identification and analysis of body parts.14 Even in extremely mutilated or fragmented bodies, DNA profiling can help establish the identity of the deceased by comparing biological samples with those of relatives or reference samples. It can also help determine whether different body fragments belong to the same individual, even when conventional identification methods are not feasible. Forensic DNA typing has been widely accepted in the courts all over

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the world. Combined DNAindex system (CODIS) short tandem repeats (STRs) kits which require very small amount of DNA, coupled with real-time polymerase chain reaction (PCR) and the statistical strengths are used routinely to identify human remains, establish paternity or to match suspected crime scene biospecimens. DNA fingerprinting was the predominant method used for identification, proved to be more helpful to determined identity in 34 cases (i.e. 66.7%), followed by dental examination in 5 cases i.e. 9.8%).4

A detailed and systematic medico-legal autopsy, including examination of personal belongings, thorough external and internal examination, and appropriate laboratory investigations, is essential for establishing identity and determining the cause of death. In cases involving severely decomposed or skeletonized remains, the history and circumstances of the incident are equally important for interpreting the autopsy findings.

Although severe mutilation may limit conventional fingerprint recovery, identifiable friction ridge patterns may sometimes be obtained from preserved fingers or recovered hands. As discussed in the study by Dr. Hemalatha et al., forensic dermatoglyphics may contribute to personal identification15. Fingerprint examination can complement DNA profiling and other identification techniques whenever suitable ridge detail is available. Skeletal examination and DNA analysis are also important in establishing identity, while radiological assessment, dental examination, and the detection of injuries or foreign bodies may provide additional evidence. Chemical analysis of recovered samples may further assist the investigation in selected cases. Therefore, a multifactorial approach integrating circumstantial information, autopsy findings, and appropriate forensic investigations is essential for establishing identity and determining the cause of death in cases involving extremely mutilated human remains.

Conclusion

Theexamination of suspected human remains from a biryani vessel shows the value of a systematic, evidence-based approach to forensic investigation. The recovery of hair and muscle tissue for DNA analysis shows that fragmented, altered or poorly preserved biological material can still be collected and processed for scientific examination. The role of forensic science in such cases goes beyond identifying biological material. It also preserves the evidentiary value of that material and produces scientifically reliable findings. Through careful documentation, appropriate laboratory investigation and correlation with other investigative findings, forensic experts can help establish identity, determine associations between exhibits and present objective evidence for judicial consideration.

Forensic examination turns complex and unusual exhibits into scientifically testable evidence that can help answer critical medicolegal questions. Suitable biological samples and representative body fragments should be preserved for future DNA comparison, identification and reconstruction, particularly when more remains may be recovered later. In unresolved cases of unidentified human remains, coordinated searches and information sharing with forensic centres and investigating agencies in neighboring districts or states may help find missing links and further identification.

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